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ABSTRACT

A primary goal of the quality movement, like the traditional management techniques that preceded it, is to get the most committed effort possible from the members of the organization. This document surveys the literature in order to summarize the substantial debate on how to achieve that goal, and then offers a theoretical context of strategic choices faced by academic libraries. One source of disagreement is the value of performance appraisals that are customarily practiced in many academic libraries. Many proponents of total quality management (TQM) criticize appraisals for creating more anxiety than motivation and for being too general to be productive. Other TQM experts defend performance appraisals, saying that collecting relevant data and giving workers feedback is a vital part of any management scheme, including the quality movement. An administrator choosing between these opinions undertakes an almost Dantean journey: The "Divine Comedy's" literal level of meaning, for example, can be translated to persisting with straightforward appraisals, and the allegorical level to embracing quality-movement concepts such as worker empowerment (kaizen) and partnering. Dante's moral level speaks to the TQM issue of intrinsic motivation, or work for its own sake without promise of reward. His highest level, the anagogical or spiritual, can be compared to the quality movement's goal of an end to bureaucracy and hierarchy, although attachment to job status and to specialization currently present obstacles to that vision. (Contains 43 references.) (BEW)

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PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL VS. QUALITY MANAGEMENT: GETTING PAST THE PARADOX

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A primary goal of the quality movement, like the traditional organization that preceded it, is to get the best possible, committed effort on the part of the members of the organization. There is substantial debate today about how best to achieve that goal. The purpose of this paper is to survey the literature in order to summarize that debate and then to offer a theoretical context of strategic choices faced by academic libraries today, as well as in the future. The choices are progressive, like the stages of a great journey, suggesting a model from the classics of literature to help us understand; but the options available to the manager are real.

Personnel performance appraisal, usually by supervisors (with occasional reliance on peer evaluation), is customarily practiced in academic libraries.[1] The process reflects prevailing management assumptions: The survival of the organization requires oversight, control, documentation, and evaluation of effectiveness, both individual and organizational. The performance appraisal process has come under fire recently, however, because of the growing influence of the principles of total quality; tools and practices used by globally competitive corporations are being applied to other organizations, including college campuses and libraries.[2] Major questions have arisen about the compatibility of performance appraisal and quality management, and they must be addressed.

Leading promoters of Total Quality Management (TQM) — or Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) — explicitly oppose performance appraisals, which, in their view, either engender fear, or are so general as to be counter-productive. The chief guru of quality, W. Edwards Deming, considered performance appraisals one of the "seven deadly diseases" afflicting management.[3] In like manner, a major critic of traditional educational evaluation asserts that it produces anxiety, is "dysfunctional to human performance," and generally serves "political" purposes.[4] The chorus of criticism is growing in intensity. Performance appraisals are credited with creating far greater anxiety than they improve performance and, indeed, cannot work appropriately.[5] In another view, performance reviews demotivate in three distinct ways: they degrade, hassle, and ignore.[6] One reason for this demotivation is explained by the role of "affect" in shaping managerial judgments. How managers feel about factors not related to job performance (such as dress, hairstyle, race, gender, sexual preference, personality) provide sources for bias in ratings.[7]

The practice is simply unacceptable to the dedicated critic. According to Peter Scholtes, performance appraisals undermine teamwork, ignore the larger system, use unreliable measurements, foster mediocrity through "safe" goals, seek to find culprits for problems, and create "losers, cynics, and wasted human resources."[8] Keki R. Bhote adds that performance appraisal by the supervisor is a "metric whose time has gone."[9] That this criticism has not appeared prominently in the library literature suggests the possible extent of our problem.

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There are those who believe performance appraisal and the quality movement to be compatible. Peter Ewell points to parallels and similarities between assessment and quality thinking, and insists that the gathering and utilization of all relevant data is consistent with both movements. In support of this attitude are inescapable basic realities: Workers need feedback, communication, and some idea of how they are doing; the organization needs documentation as an antidote for litigation.[10] The roles and functions played by traditional performance appraisal encompass the general tasks of supervision and the practice of professional librarians as overseeing nonprofessional staff. The central issue is control, a deeply held convention of hierarchy. The instinct is deeply entrenched and may be the final holdout in face of the rising tide of the quality transformation.

What is to be done? An administrator has to make some conscious choices, first between immediate options, and later with regard to long-term vision. And so the journey must begin, a journey that starts prosaically and then ventures into ever more complex spheres, where beliefs and assumptions must be challenged. For a model for our journey let us turn to Dante's Commedia, where the levels of meaning ascend from the literal to the allegorical to the moral and, finally, the anagogical, having to do with final, spiritual matters.

DO IT RIGHT

The first, literal, option is to continue on course, to assume that the organization is permanent, that control is necessary, and that the proper task is to do the job right. Gathering appropriate and current information, designing the necessary information system, providing frequent feedback, measuring extensively, and developing quality communications are the components of a quality information system.[11] Tom Peters emphasizes constancy, simplification, recognition, and reward as the necessary ingredients for a quality performance evaluation program.[12] Breaking the task into measurable components like skill variety, task identity, and task significance facilitate measurement and the enlargement of the job both vertically and horizontally.[13]

Information-based performance planning and monitoring offer sophisticated tools and processes for the levels of analysis needed for the use and evaluation of staff performance measurement and improvement.[14] Measuring, monitoring, and analyzing processes and services is the solution made possible by information technology, and this is one path available to the library manager. But it is a path predicated on organizational stability and control, and that appears short-sighted in a time of massive restructuring of the economy and revolutionary overhauling of major corporate institutions.[15]

PARTNER

The alternative short-term choice is to embrace the quality movement. Here we find a history of steady progression from quality circles to kaizen to suggestion systems through team building to empowerment and, finally, partnering. Here is our second, allegorical level of significance, where a subject takes on meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The language of quality is practical and real, but the meaning is far more significant because we are talking about a fundamental shift in how employees are treated, an abandonment of control efforts in favor of written agreements and a gradual transmigration from subordinates to partners.

The path to partnering has become symbolic and value-laden. But partnering

did not emerge from the womb fully developed. It is the culmination of a process that began with participative management and evolved through the stages of development of the quality movement from quality circles to teams to process redesign through empowerment.

Team building and teamwork are major themes in the literature of quality. The power of collaboration among "compeers" to solve problems and develop innovative processes is noted in a large body of literature. Teams are a natural correlate to staff empowerment; group decision making and peer pressure and evaluation change the work of the manager immediately.[16] Team building is certainly a major path to quality and empowerment.

Empowerment is an overworked buzzword today, demanding careful definition. One popular management book suggests that it means that you "own" your job and have responsibility for directing your own effort, that you have been given clear direction, and that you have the knowledge, resources, and support to carry out the responsibilities.[17] Richard Tabor Greene offers a model of empowerment with seven steps: intervention or challenge; awakening to possibility; confirming action or commitment; viewpoint enlargement; bridge community (opening to new people); formalizing or institutionalizing gains; and formal bridge community, the deliberate choice of new possibilities.[18] There is danger in this approach unless clear goals and shared purpose are in place; empowering people to do their own thing can be disruptive to organizational purpose if the energies unleashed do not serve the common goal.

The Japanese rendering of empowerment is kaizen, or continuous improvement. Kaizen is a philosophy that can guide individual, team, or corporate behavior toward well understood organizational goals.[19] Kaizen should be combined with teian, or employee suggestions, to comprise an elaborate system for getting employee input for continuous improvement. Successful global companies like Toyota are noted for the implementation of thousands of employee suggestions annually. A well designed and comprehensive suggestion system can be a tool for going beyond participative management to obtain the best efforts of an entire workforce.[20]

A final theme regarding empowerment is self-empowerment. An highly influential book (that is outside the "official" quality movement) is Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey proposes that the first three of his habits (being proactive, setting goals, and self management) are the road to self-empowerment (though he does not use the term).[21] In the same tradition comes *Quality is Personal* by Roberts and Sergesketter. This work offers personal quality checklists and similarly simple tools for self-improvement as the proper road to Total Quality Management.[22] Dedicated people, and not just educated people, can take a strong hand in managing their own performance. Group self-studies are a current practice consistent with this approach, and have been used in libraries.[23]

A step that falls just short of partnering is the performance targeting proposal of Halachmi, suggesting the replacement of goals set for the individual with a contract spelling out mutual obligations to cooperate in advancing the goals of the operation.[24] This type of contractual agreement acknowledges the critical role of the supervisor in making it possible for the staff to succeed.

The basics of partnering involve putting expectations, projections, and commitments in writing. Integrity, a shift from subordinates to "direct reports," and a move to mutual, written, expectations

become guiding principles. Partnering removes problems found with performance appraisals: Expectations are clarified and shared, unproductive behaviors are highlighted, good performers are not slighted so that attention can be devoted to poor performers, and rankings and ratings are avoided.[25] Compensation and reward are negotiated and form a basic cornerstone for partnering. Partnering has emerged as a basic strategy for networking enterprises large and small, as well as a new model for employer-employee relationships.[26] Most of all, the idea of partnering escapes the fatal superior-subordinate "control" dichotomy.

Thus we have our short-term choices: Continue on course, or embrace the quality-partnering continuum. Further along our journey we must turn to higher matters, of long-term strategic — and "spiritual" — significance. The first decision regards a challenging idea to our assumptions about human motivation. How we decide on that issue will influence our approach to long-term strategic thinking.

REWARDS?

For Dante the moral level of understanding concerned threats to the human soul in this world; the character of an individual mattered more than any achievement. Such is precisely the dilemma posed by Alfie Kohn in his highly disturbing book, *Punished by Rewards*. Kohn challenges our most cherished ideals about human motivation by arguing a simple but powerful point: If people are rewarded for doing something, they quickly lose interest in doing that something for its own sake. To reward students for studying assures they will hate it. A bonus for special effort on the job assures that the recipient will never do that work for its inherent interest or value. Outside, or extrinsic motivation is counter productive; only intrinsic motivation lasts.

Drawing on extensive research, Kohn argues that rewards are wrong, ineffective, and counter productive because they punish (all the others), rupture relationships, ignore reasons, discourage risk taking, and, primarily, kill interest! They change behavior ... to get the reward. They definitely do not foster the desired behavior on an ongoing internalized basis. What does Kohn offer as an alternative? Seniority, profit-sharing, level of responsibility each have their merits as a basis for compensation. But the key for a successful organization is to create an atmosphere fostering authentic motivation, and that requires collaboration, freedom to make decisions, and meaningful work.[27]

The importance of this can be found in the fact that most quality management approaches rely heavily on rewards and recognition.[28] The question of rewards, if resolved in favor of Kohn, will require a complete restructuring of the quality movement, but that is beyond our scope. And when we begin to think about this, we soon realize why. Rewards imply a superior-subordinate relationship, and that is the root of the problem.

TRANSFORMATION

It seems rather in bad taste to compare the transformation of the modern organization to Dante's anagogical level of meaning, which alludes to the departure of the soul from this corrupt world to the eternal, the ultimate spiritual or mystical sense. Yet the analogy is strangely apt in that we are talking about the "end of bureaucracy" and hierarchy on the way to something quite different. The organizational structures that served us well in the industrial age are giving way before the power of information and change; the assumptions behind performance appraisal will no longer pertain. This is as true of academic libraries as it is of corporations.

The movement to transform organizations is proceeding on several tracks, with their parallel impacts not always fully observed. For example "downsizing" has become regular fare in the mass media; outsourcing is a popular theme in business literature. The end of bureaucracy, the intelligent organization, and the learning organization are themes of influential new books seeking to guide us. The quality movement has shown the way by reducing organizational barriers to creating responsive organizations, by emphasizing such approaches as customer focus, process innovation, and cycle time management.[29]

There are major obstacles to this transformation. One problem that is becoming acknowledged is professionalism. In *Global Quality* Greene argues forcefully that the status and specialization of professions — as fostered by academe — pose a major threat to the development of quality institutions in America. In contrast with Japan, where professionalism and the Ph.D. degree have been consciously despecialized, professionalism in this country hinders the teamwork, the cross-functional collaboration, and the information sharing necessary for organizational transformation.[30] Other obstacles to the transparent organization include occupational subcultures and the extensive, specialized experience obtained by many skilled and professional workers. Many occupations enjoy degrees of control over their work that survive the most determined organizational transformation effort. Other major obstacles include the high cost of training, managerial and union opposition, and the lack of any institutional mandate for sharing information such as exists in Europe.[31] These stubborn realities comprise major hindrances to overhauling organizations. The chasms between traditional technical and public service librarianship illustrate this problem, as do the incredibly detailed expectations of many intermediate-level job announcements. Professionalism will be a central issue for librarians in the decades ahead.

Transformation, however, is far more than reengineering an organization, or making it flat or responsive: It involves destroying the old to make way for the new. Tom Peters discusses "necessary disorganization" to achieve the required flexibility.[32] Gifford Pinchot proposes entrapreneuring as a means to replacing bureaucratic procedures with freedom of choice to gain market-driven reponsiveness.[33] Brazil's anarchic Semco utilizes "unsupervised, in-house, company-supported satellite production of goods and services" allowing use of company equipment by contractors and associates to survive major recession and restructuring.[34] A step just short of transformation is the transparent organization, one that includes the customer in planning and process until the organization becomes transparent to its customers. In this company customers are never "transferred" to someone else to help them; the first person contacted resolves their problem.[35]

All of the changes discussed above involve continual learning. The successful organization of the future will be a learning organization. There is a great deal of irony here as we turn to the learning organization as a model for the library. The library is supposed to be a central component in the learning process, but we have not "walked our talk" regarding training and staff development compared to Motorola and the armed services.[36]

The learning organization is still poorly defined and understood. Charles Handy suggests that the learning organization is always answering a question, testing a theory, or solving a problem.[37] For Chris

Argyris it is detecting errors, taking action, and correcting errors.[38] Peter Senge suggests that the learning organization goes beyond personal mastery, mental models, the development of shared vision and team learning to achieve systems thinking through the development of "communities of servant leaders."[39] Daniel Tobin offers five principles of the learning organization: everyone is a learner, people learn from each other, learning enables change, learning is continuous, and learning is an investment rather than an expense.[40] The best and most succinct definition comes from David Garvin, "A learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights."[41]

Shoshana Zuboff outlined the problem and the solution a few years ago in *The Age of the Smart Machine*. Hierarchy is dysfunctional in the information organization, and new forms of authority are required. A new image of work must prevail, one based on equality, experimentation, and the expansion of knowledge. Productivity today is learning; learning is the new form of labor; the work of management and therefore, amounts to intellectual skill development, technology development, strategy formulation, and social system development.[42]

Leaders and organizations alike must learn new skills and competencies in the coming days. Whether the goal is understanding what the customer truly needs, overcoming professional entropy, or building teams, librarians must cultivate the requisite skills to accomplish the desired goals. We have the ability to learn, as well as colleagues and organizations skilled at accessing information and adapting to new technology. If we could just stop worrying so much about where we have been during the past year and to what degree employee X achieved their goals, we would have more time to find our way through this learning process.

Vergil and reason can guide us through information gathering and analysis and show us new vistas through the promise of participation and partnering. But this journey may require acts of faith if we are to follow our Beatrice and perceive higher truths beyond where our bureaucracies and professionalism can take us.[43] One thing we can be sure of: The journey will not be easy.

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[43] Thanks to the Beatrice who guided me into this reading of Dante, Dr. Sara Burroughs, Professor of English at Northwestern State University, a teaching partner in the Western Civilization program at Oklahoma Baptist University in the early 1970s.